

The Armand de Potter Collection of Ancient Egyptian Art



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IN 1908 THE BROOKLYN MUSEUM AUGMENTED ITS HOLDINGS IN ancient Egyptian antiquities with the purchase of the Armand de Potter Collection, sold to Brooklyn by de Potter's widow. The published histories of Brooklyn's Egyptian Department give only superficial notice of the obscure Mr. de Potter.¹ This neglect underscores how little we know about the man and his collection.² In this brief essay—dedicated to William Kelly Simpson, himself a connoisseur and collector of Egyptian art—I will relate the highlights of de Potter's life and clarify some of the confusion surrounding the only comprehensive publication of his collection, a pamphlet appropriately entitled *The De Potter Collection*. Like every good tale, this one has a moral: the relationship between an exacting curator and a captious collector has changed little in the last one hundred years.

Armand de Potter was a Frenchman born in 1850, or very early in 1851 (perhaps as P.L. Armand de Potter, P.L. Armand de Pottier, or P.L. Armand de Pothier).³ By the time he emigrated to the United States, no

¹ For the history of the Department, see, for example, Richard A. Fazzini, in *Ancient Egyptian Art in The Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn, 1989), pp. vii–x.

² Two scholars have written, albeit briefly, about Armand de Potter. John D. Cooney characterized Mr. and Mrs. de Potter as “apparently well-to-do and enthusiastic” collectors “who appear to have been in Egypt and adjacent areas for a few years just before and after 1890.” He also determined that part of de Potter's collection had been on exhibition at the University Museum in Philadelphia after 1893; John D. Cooney, “Assorted Errors in Art Collecting,” *Expedition* 6,1 (Fall 1963), pp. 22–23. Judith A. Lerner discovered that Armand de Potter owned a highly successful travel company, De Potter's European and World Tours, that often included trips to Egypt on its “Oriental” and “World” itineraries; “Three Achaemenid ‘Fakes,’ a Re-evaluation in Light of 19th Century Iranian Architectural Sculpture,” *Expedition* 22,2 (Winter 1980), p. 16.

³ The minutes of Union College Trustees Meeting of 22 June 1880 indicate that an honorary A.M. degree was awarded on that day to “Professor P.L. Armand De Pottier” of Albany, New York (p. 96). This spelling also appears in the *Union University–Centennial Catalog 1795–1895* (Schenectady, N.Y., 1895), p. 145. He is called “Prof. P.L. Armand de Pothier” in a Union College publication, *Concordiensis* 3,9 (June 1880), p. 145. The year of de Potter's birth is provided by a Bradstreet's report on file in the archives of the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (henceforth U.Mus. Archives). It lists his age on 8 January 1902 as 51.

later than 1878, he had risen to the rank of colonel in the French army.⁴ With no suitable documentation for de Potter's years in France we must resort to inference. Almost certainly he belonged to a family of wealth and standing. Although the French army expanded dramatically in the decade after the Franco-Prussian War,⁵ de Potter could not have risen so high, so fast without influential family connections. He must also have been well educated. De Potter was fluent in German and English; he secured a teaching position in a private academy almost immediately upon arriving in the United States; in 1880 a major American university awarded him an honorary M.A. degree;⁶ and throughout his life he recounted his various academic accomplishments with considerable pride.⁷

In October 1878 Armand de Potter married the fourth of six children of William S. and Ann M. (née Collyer) Beckwith of Red Hook in Dutchess County, New York. The given name of de Potter's bride is uncertain because the Beckwith family's official history lists her as Annie G., and the Dutchess County records identify her as Amy.⁸ By 1880 Mrs. de Potter was using the name Aimée.⁹ De Potter married well. His father-in-law, William Beckwith was an "Old Yankee" whose family history in North America can be traced to an ancestor who settled in Hartford, Connecticut in 1639. A prosperous farmer, William Beckwith

⁴ Paul Beckwith, *The Beckwiths* (Albany, N.Y., 1891), p. 154.

⁵ Ernest John Knapton, *France: An Interpretive History* (New York, 1971), p. 432.

⁶ See above, note 3.

⁷ In a letter written in 1897, de Potter states: "In 1880 I received the degree of M.A. at Union College [see above, note 3]; in 1883 Docteur es Lettres, University of France; have been for 25 years a member of the American Oriental Society; since 1883 a life member of the Archaeological Society of France—and [for] some years an officer at the Royal Academic Institute of Italy;" Armand de Potter (henceforth AdP) to Sara Yorke Stevenson (henceforth SYS), New York, 24 May 1897, U.Mus. Archives. Regarding de Potter's French degree, Michel Dewachter observes: "... il faut comprendre *Docteur es Lettres de l'Université* (française), et très probablement de la Faculté de Lettres de Paris, mais absolument pas du Collège de France: cet établissement n'étant pas habilité à décerner un tel titre." (personal communication, 21 September 1994).

⁸ Cf. Beckwith, *The Beckwiths*, p. 154 (this source indicates that she was born on 14 March 1857) and *Commemorative Biographical Record of Dutchess County, New York, Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens, and of Many of the Early Settled Families* (Chicago, 1897), p. 767. The problem of Mrs. de Potter's Christian name is further complicated by the fact that, despite the claims of the Beckwith family historian (see above), her middle initial was S, not G (see, for example, the letter signed by her cited below, note 44).

⁹ According to the records of the Albany Female Academy in Albany, New York. Mrs. de Potter continued to use the name Aimée at least until 1908 (see later letter cited below, note 44). This Francophilic affectation was perhaps the product of personal regard for French culture, her wish to acknowledge her husband's homeland, a name she adopted while studying or living in France, or an interplay among some or all of these influences.

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owned "one of the best farms in the town of Red Hook, comprising... 144 acres of rich and fertile land,"¹⁰ he also held several important local offices including Town Supervisor and Tax Assessor and was an influential member of the Democratic Party in New York State.

By September 1879 Armand and Aimée de Potter had settled in Albany, capital of New York State.¹¹ Armand joined the faculty of the Albany Female Academy (now the Albany Academy for Girls) as Professor of Modern Languages and Literature (i.e., French and German).¹² His wife, Aimée, began teaching French at the Academy in 1880. Their association with the Academy, the oldest and one of the most prestigious private schools for girls in the city, provided the de Potters with an entrée into the highest levels of Albany society.

These social ties would serve the young, ambitious Armand de Potter well in business. In 1882 he resigned his teaching position to devote his unqualified attention to De Potter's European and World Tours, a tourist agency he had founded in Albany three years earlier while still at the Academy.¹³ De Potter specialized in European tours for "the better sort." Twice a year he and Aimée conducted groups—initially comprising wealthy Albanians; later he would cultivate a truly national clientele—to the major tourist attractions in Europe.¹⁴ To advertise his tours, while allaying the anxieties of prospective clients, de Potter edited and published an annual journal, *The Old World and European Guide*. Each volume offered endorsements from satisfied customers, practical advice for the first-time traveler,¹⁵ listings of currency exchange rates, and short articles on academic subjects. In addition to his European tours, de Potter would occasionally lead a seven-month long "Grand Tour Around the World." A major component of these tours was an extended visit to Egypt's major archaeological sites.¹⁶ De

¹⁰ *Commemorative Biographical Record* (1897), p. 766.

¹¹ In 1879–1880 the de Potters resided at 59 Maiden Lane in Albany; they moved to 105 State Street in 1881. The Albany City Directory for 1883 indicates that they were no longer living within the municipal limits in that year. In all probability the de Potters had moved to one of Albany's more fashionable suburbs, such as Loudonville, Guilderland, or Bethlehem, each quite accessible to Albany by carriage.

¹² *Albany Evening News* (19 June 1880), p. 10.

¹³ The offices were located at 645 Broadway in Albany; the company motto was "Reisen ist Leben."

¹⁴ *The Old World and European Guide* 6,1 (1886), p. 1.

¹⁵ E.g., "For travel, ladies require three sets of underclothing, one set of warm flannels, an old silk or woolen dress for railroad, etc., a dress suitable to wear in hotels and galleries, and a thin cool dress for Italy to replace the woolen traveling dress, a light wrap, a shawl, a plain hat and a sun umbrella. A gossamer waterproof will be found useful." *Old World* 6,1 (1886), p. 20.

Potter must have spent some of his free time in Egypt frequenting the shops of antiquities dealers in Cairo and Upper Egypt.

By 1893 de Potter had both established an office in New York¹⁷ and, more importantly for this narrative, amassed a sizeable collection of Egyptian objects. In the spring of that year he exhibited 270 pieces from his collection—clearly not all he actually owned—in the Anthropology Building of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.¹⁸ De Potter limited the installations to objects focusing on the theme of religious belief and practice, including images of the principal Egyptian deities as well as cultic and funerary objects. The display was dominated by several cases of bronze statuettes and faience amulets of gods (fig. 1); a number of *shabtis*, animal mummies, stone vessels, faience necklaces, and scarabs were also exhibited.¹⁹ As a supplement to the installation, de Potter authored and published a forty-four page catalog, *The Egyptian Pantheon*,²⁰ containing an overview of Egyptian history, two short essays on the major Egyptian deities and funerary religion, a list of the objects on view (usually with a description one or two sentences in length), and a glossary and index.

¹⁶ The 1887 tour, for example, included stops at Cairo, Heliopolis, Giza, Memphis, Saqqara, Mit Rahineh, Rhoda, Minya, Abydos, Qenna, Thebes (including Karnak and Luxor), Aswan, and "many interesting temples and other ruins," *ibid.*, p. 79. De Potter's 1890 visit to Egypt was his third trip to the country; A. de Potter, "The Land of the Pharaohs," *Old World* 12 (1891), p. 77. Readers interested in travelers' impressions of Cairo in the 1890s are commended to de Potter's articles in the *Old World*. His observations about Cairo hotels, particularly the New Hotel, which he describes in considerable detail, are particularly illuminating; *ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

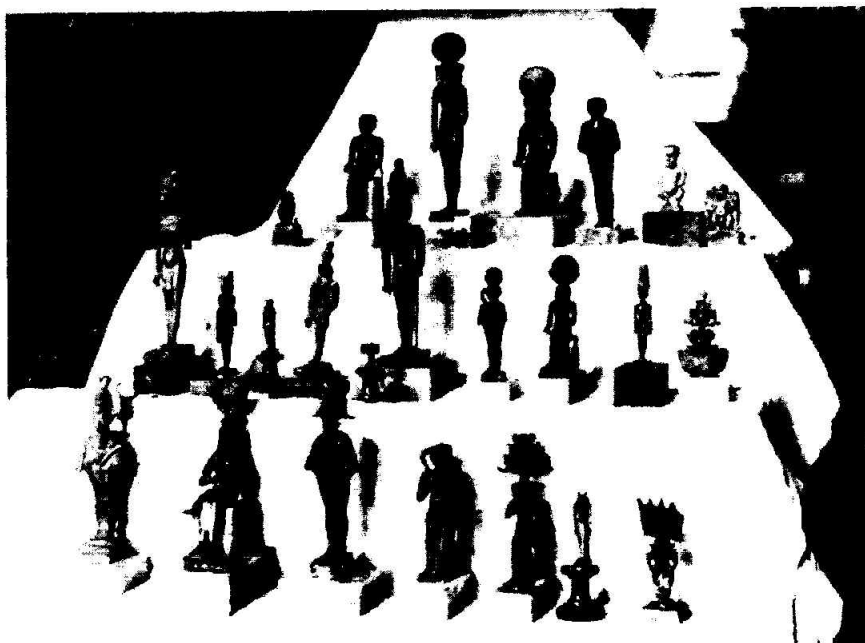
¹⁷ De Potter's first office was located at 1466 Broadway; he later moved to 1122 Broadway. Despite opening a new company headquarters in New York, he maintained his old office in Albany. De Potter's European and Oriental Tours flourished in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1899 he claimed a personal worth of \$125,000, with no debts, and maintained residences in New York and Pasadena, California. De Potter was described as "reliable in his dealings and prompt in discharging his obligations;" see the Bradstreet's report cited in note 3.

¹⁸ For the Anthropology Building, see John J. Flinn, *Official Guide to the World's Columbia Exposition in the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, May 1 to October 26, 1893, by the Authority of the United States of America* (Chicago, 1893), p. 37. Normally the packing, insurance, and shipping of so many objects would have caused major inconvenience. Because the de Potters relocated from Albany to New York City in 1893, their antiquities had to be moved to the de Potter's new home. Any difficulties created by "detouring" the collection through Chicago would have been minimal.

¹⁹ Sara Yorke Stevenson, "Egypt, Babylonia, and Greece," in *Report of the Committee on Awards of the World's Columbian Commission; Special Reports upon Special Subjects or Groups I* (Washington, D.C., 1901), p. 341, figs. 19 and 20.

²⁰ Armand de Potter, *The Egyptian Pantheon: An Explanatory Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities, Collected and Classified with Especial Reference to the Religion and Funerary Rites of Ancient Egypt, by Armand de Potter, and Exhibited in the Egyptian Section of the Archaeological Department in the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A. (New York, 1893).*

Fig. 1. View of twenty-four objects from the de Potter Collection on exhibit at the World's Columbian Exposition (1893). Twenty are now in The Brooklyn Museum. Top row: 08.480.34, .24, .29, .98, .25, .137, and .106; middle row: repository not known (henceforth rnk), .37, .150, .47, .68, .50, .36, rnk, .43, and .65; bottom row: .38, .49, .27, .26, rnk, rnk, and .33. From Stevenson, *Report I* (1901), fig. 19.



The installation in the Anthropology Building also included antiquities on loan from the University Museum, Philadelphia.²¹ Many had been excavated by W.M.F. Petrie during his recent seasons at Tell Defenneh, Gurob, Lahun, Meidum, and El Amarna.²² Sara Yorke Stevenson (1847–1921), Curator of the Museum's Egyptian and Mediterranean section, brought these objects to Chicago and supervised their installation.²³ It was then that she met Armand de Potter. Their camaraderie must have been instinctive, for there were striking similarities in their experience and interests. Although an American citizen, Stevenson's

²¹ Although this institution was officially known as the Free Museum of Science and Art for much of its early history, at the turn of the century it was commonly referred to as the University Museum. This name became official in 1913; David O'Connor and David Silverman, "The Egyptian Collection," *Expedition* 21,2 (1979), p. 34. In 1994 the University Museum changed its name to the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. For the sake of convenience, it will be called the University Museum throughout this article.

²² Stevenson, *Report I* (Washington, D.C., 1901), pp. 337–41. As a major sponsor of the Egypt Exploration Fund, the University Museum received a generous share of Petrie's finds.

²³ For Sara Yorke Stevenson, see especially Christine Moon van Ness, "Sara Yorke Stevenson," in Ute Gacs, et al., eds., *Women Anthropologists: Selected Biographies* (Urbana and Chicago, 1989), pp. 344–49 (with bibliography and listing of selected works by SYS); to the bibliography at the end of that entry, add O'Connor and Silverman, "The Museum in the Field," *Expedition* 21,2 (Winter, 1979), pp. 13–19, fig. 15; and *ibid.*, pp. 33–37 (see also fig. 2 on page 5 of that volume for a photograph of Stevenson).

background was, like de Potter's, French. She was born and educated in Paris, living there, almost exclusively until she was fifteen.²⁴ Both were comfortable in the society of ladies and gentlemen of wealth and influence, and, they shared—one as curator, the other as collector—a profound intellectual devotion to the past.²⁵

Sara Stevenson could be persuasive. Although de Potter originally intended to sell his collection at the Exposition's close,²⁶ Stevenson convinced him to lend his objects to the University Museum for "at least three years."²⁷ The relationship between de Potter and the University Museum would last well beyond that prescribed limit. He continued to purchase antiquities almost yearly and ship them to directly to the Museum.²⁸ In 1896, for example, he sent a green faience pectoral in the form of a naos with an inlaid scarab.²⁹ Five years later de Potter forwarded to Stevenson a case of Coptic textiles purchased from Albert Jean Gayet (1856–1916) of the Musée Guimet.³⁰ Undoubtedly his most significant acquisition was a pair of nested coffins, a mummy board, mummy, and pair of gold earrings of the High Priest of Amun, Paseba-

²⁴ Moon Van Ness, in *Woman Anthropologists* (1989), p. 344.

²⁵ Stevenson's interest in the past can be traced to the years 1858–1862. Each weekend she left the confines of the Institution Descauriot for the intellectual stimulation afforded by her French guardians M. and Mme. Achille Jubinal. M. Jubinal was himself a scholar, connoisseur, and collector with a particular interest in ancient tapestries and arms. His insatiable quest for information and objects left a life-long impression on the girl; Frances A. Wister, *Sara Yorke Stevenson* (Philadelphia, 1922), p. 9.

²⁶ Mrs. Stevenson made this claim many years later; SYS to the President of the Museum's Board of Managers (Samuel F. Houston), Philadelphia, 27 December 1905, U.Mus. Archives.

²⁷ The Museum was obviously quite pleased to welcome the loan. The 1893 Report of the President of the Board of Managers on the Department of Archaeology and Paleontology lauded the de Potter material as "one of the most valuable collections of Egyptian bronze statuettes and other small objects in this country," quoted in Wister, *Sara Yorke Stevenson*, p. 35.

²⁸ The University Museum's records contain copies of receipts for shipments from de Potter dated November 1893, 19 November 1894, 27 April 1896, 4 March 1897, 13 June 1898, 19 October 1898, and (no date) 1901.

²⁹ Brooklyn 08.480.159; Erika Feucht, *Pektorale Nichtköniglicher Personen, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 22 (Wiesbaden, 1971), p. 76, no. 54, pl. 33.

³⁰ AdP to SYS, Summit, New Jersey, 12 March 1902, University Museum Archives. In this letter de Potter mentions that he bought the textiles from Gayet "at the Musée Guimet." From this wording it is unclear whether the textiles belonged to Gayet, or he sold de Potter objects from the collection of the Musée Guimet. These textiles are probably those currently cataloged in The Brooklyn Museum as 08.480.52–59; for 08.480.52, see John D. Cooney, *Late Egyptian and Coptic Art: an Introduction to the Collections in The Brooklyn Museum* (Brooklyn, 1943), p. 22, pl. 44; Deborah Thompson, *Coptic Textiles in The Brooklyn Museum*, Wilbour Monographs 2 (Brooklyn, 1971), p. 34, no. 12; and Claudia Nauerth, *Koptische Textilkunst im spätantiken Ägypten: Die Sammlung Rautenstrauch im Städtischen Museum Simeonstift Trier* (Trier, 1978), p. 47, no. 33, n. 66.



Fig. 2. Brooklyn 08.480.1A&B: outer coffin of Pasebakhaemipet, wood overlaid with gesso and painted, from Deir el Bahri, mid-Dynasty 21, length: 2.13 m., Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund.

khaemipet, who was buried at Deir el Bahri in mid-Dynasty 21 (fig. 2).³¹ De Potter obtained them in 1894 from Emile Brugsch (1842–1930) the year after he discovered them “150 metres au n-e du temple de DeB.”³²

Until the University Museum opened at its present location in December 1899, de Potter’s collection was exhibited in the University Library—the present Furness Building—in cases with labels acknowledging his ownership (fig. 3). They stood amidst, but separate from, other cabinets containing the balance of the Museum’s Egyptian antiquities. Eventually de Potter chafed at this arrangement, claiming it denied his collection the prominence it deserved by right of quality. He could temporarily overlook the existing installation but insisted that his pieces be isolated in one room when the new building eventually opened.³³ But he was to be even less satisfied with the new galleries which displayed the antiquities typologically rather than by provenance.

De Potter reacted strongly when he discovered his pieces interspersed among the rest of the Museum’s holdings in what must have appeared, to him, an unseemly amalgamation.³⁴ In March 1902 he inquired about the procedure for removing his objects from the Museum.³⁵ By then Stevenson had come to realize that the road to de Potter’s sympathies lay in his vanity. She wrote him, declaring her intention to produce a *catalogue resonnant* of the de Potter Collection, assuring him that, “[I] have already the material for it. When this appears, it must, of course do you dignified credit among the learned public.”³⁶

³¹ Brooklyn Museum 08.4801A&B and 2A–F, *PM* 1², p. 636; Andrzej Niwiński, *21st Dynasty Coffins from Thebes: Chronological and Typological Studies*, Theben 5, edited by Jan Assmann (Mainz, 1988), pp. 158–59, no. 301, with additional references.

³² A complete description of the coffins written by E. Brugsch can be found in the University Museum Archives. It was sent by Aimée de Potter along with a letter to Sara Y. Stevenson announcing that the coffins had been shipped to Philadelphia, Aimée de Potter to SYS, Alexandria, 2 March 1894, U.Mus. Archives.

³³ AdP to SYS, Jerusalem, 16 March 1896, U.Mus. Archives.

³⁴ “I feel that my little collection, placed as it is amid all the rich treasures of your museum has not been and is not appreciated by the Directors nor by the faculty of the University.... If the Directors of your Museum care to retain my collection for some time to come as a loan, I would like to have my scarabs and all other objects *placed together* and have them well marked as belonging to the *De Potter Collection*. I feel that in this way only can one see of what it consists. Of course I appreciate your idea of classification, but it prevents my collection of receiving due recognition *as a whole!*”; AdP to SYS, Summit, N.J., 1 March 1901, U.Mus. Archives.

³⁵ “I would also ask you how long before removing my collection, I should send notice of my intention to do so. I am now thinking of making a change next October,” AdP to SYS, Summit, N.J., 12 March 1902, U.Mus. Archives.

³⁶ SYS to AdP, Philadelphia, 19 June 1902, U.Mus. Archives.



De Potter's constant carping and quibbling no doubt tried Mrs. Stevenson's patience. He repeatedly complained about a misunderstanding concerning reimbursement for shipping charges³⁷ and attempted to induce her, without success, to write some complimentary comments about his collection for either the *American Journal of Archaeology* or the *Old World*.³⁸ Upon receiving an official receipt for the Paseba-khaempet coffins, de Potter instructed his secretary to write the University Museum asking if he could add to the document "a few words of

Fig. 3. View of the University Museum's Egyptian installation in the University Library (now the Furness Building), circa 1898. De Potter's objects can be seen in the cabinet projecting from the left wall and in the free-standing case beneath the staircase. Photo: courtesy the the University of Pennsylvania Archives.

³⁷ E.g., AdP to SYS, Summit, N.J., 1 March 1901, U.Mus. Archives, and AdP to SYS, New York, 13 May 1902, U.Mus. Archives.

³⁸ De Potter's secretary (Edmund Gastinian) to SYS, New York, 20 December 1893; and E. Gastinian to SYS, New York, 13 December 1894, U.Mus. Archives.

introduction and affix Mrs. Stevenson's name to it, simply as if it were an extract.... If I could do this, I would also ask permission, if not objectionable, to add to the sentence 'such cases are very difficult to obtain,' the words 'and this one is unique in this country.' I think Dr. de Potter understood Mrs. Stevenson to say this."³⁹ Her equanimity was severely tested in 1897 when de Potter requested that she "use [her] influence, and the probable usefulness of my little collection, to obtain for me some hon. degree from the University."⁴⁰ She promised to "see some of my friends about it and [determine] what can be done."⁴¹ Apparently she let the matter drop. De Potter's importunity, however, resurfaced four years later: "... some Hon. Degree... would of course attach me more to the Museum—As it is, I am often asked why I have my collection in Philadelphia and not New York. At all events I will leave the collection in the Museum for the present."⁴²

The sometimes fractious relationship between Stevenson and Armand de Potter ended abruptly in 1905. She resigned her curatorship on 8 March of that year,⁴³ and he died, in June, "while returning from a trip in the interior of Greece."⁴⁴ Soon thereafter Aimée de Potter began casting about for a museum to purchase her late husband's collection. She first approached the University Museum. Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. (1872–1916) recommended offering Mrs. de Potter \$500,⁴⁵ but in the face of strong objections to the transaction by David Randall-MacIver (1873–1945), director of the Museum's excavations in Egypt and Nubia, the Board of Managers decided not to pursue the matter.⁴⁶

Aimée de Potter may then have contacted the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, but the records of these institutions contain no correspondence from her. In 1907 she did write

³⁹ E. Gastinian to U. Mus. Secretary (S.M. Hunter), New York, 27 December 1894, U. Mus. Archives.

⁴⁰ AdP to SYS, New York, 24 May 1897, U. Mus. Archives.

⁴¹ SYS to AdP, Philadelphia, 27 May 1897, U. Mus. Archives.

⁴² AdP to SYS, Geneva, 20 September 1902, U. Mus. Archives.

⁴³ See O'Connor and Silverman, *Expedition* 21,1 (1979), p. 19.

⁴⁴ Aimée de Potter to SYS, n.p., 13 December 1905, U. Mus. Archives.

⁴⁵ E.B. Coxe, Jr. to President of U. Mus. Board of Managers (S.F. Houston), memo dated 18 April 1907, U. Mus. Archives; for Coxe, see O'Connor and Silverman, "Eckley Brinton Coxe, Jr.," *Expedition* 21,2 (Winter 1979), p. 44.

⁴⁶ On the day the Board voted to reject Aimée de Potter's offer, Randall-MacIver voiced three objections to purchasing the collection: 1. the Museum already had material of its own which it could not display for lack of exhibition space; 2. the de Potter Collection contained only "a small number of specimens which I should have liked to have acquired..." and 3. the \$500 price was too high; Randall-MacIver to S.F. Houston, memo dated 25 September 1907, U. Mus. Archives.

to James Henry Breasted, Director of the Haskell Oriental Museum of The University of Chicago (now The Oriental Institute Museum), perhaps hoping he would recall seeing the collection at the World's Columbia Exposition fourteen years earlier.⁴⁷ She sent him two letters (dated 27 December 1907 and 9 January 1908) offering to sell the entire collection or, if he wished, only the nested coffins of Pasebakhaemipet.⁴⁸ Breasted did not respond until October 1908.⁴⁹ By then much of the de Potter Collection had moved to its current repository, The Brooklyn Museum.

Aimée de Potter's letters to Breasted mention that both mailings contained a copy of a catalog of her husband's collection. She sent either the 1893 publication, *The Egyptian Pantheon*, or a twenty-eight page, illustrated catalog called *The De Potter Collection*.⁵⁰ This extremely rare book—truly a pamphlet—was written anonymously and bears neither date nor place of publication. Judith Lerner averred that its appearance must have postdated 20 September 1902 when "De Potter wrote to Mrs. Stevenson asking that the University Museum produce an illustrative catalogue of his collection. Since the actual catalogue produced bears the name of no publisher or institution, it must be assumed that De Potter eventually published it himself."⁵¹ Although her attribution of the book to a post-1902 date is correct, Lerner overlooked two key points: 1. De Potter's letter of 20 September contained his *response* to Stevenson's offer to prepare a catalog,⁵² and 2) the first sentence in *The De Potter Collection* states that the "collection was made with great care by the *late* [italics mine] owner, Armand de Potter."⁵³ Obviously, the pamphlet could not have been written or published by de Potter and must postdate June, 1905. Because the catalog mentions neither the

⁴⁷ Breasted was working on his dissertation in Berlin in 1893 and probably never saw the Exposition; John A. Larson (personal communication; 19 September 1994).

⁴⁸ Aimée de Potter to J.H. Breasted, Asheville, North Carolina, 27 December 1907, and 9 January 1908, Oriental Institute Archives. Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago.

⁴⁹ Breasted had been abroad until late September or early October, 1908. J.H. Breasted to Aimée de Potter, Chicago, 14 October 1908, Oriental Institute Archives. Courtesy of The Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago.

⁵⁰ A copy of *The Egyptian Pantheon* is today among the holdings of the Joseph Regenstein Library, the current home of the former Oriental Institute Library. Its presence there, however, does not prove that it was one of the two catalogs Aimée de Potter sent to Breasted. It could have entered the library at any time as a souvenir of the World's Columbian Exposition any time after it opened in May 1893.

⁵¹ Lerner, *Expedition* 22,2 (1980), p. 16.

⁵² See above, note 36.

⁵³ *The De Potter Collection* [n.p., n.d.], p. 1.

University Museum, which surrendered any claim to the collection on 25 September 1907, nor The Brooklyn Museum, which purchased the de Potter material on 21 March 1908, the text must have been completed during this six month period. Furthermore, if it was the book she sent to Breasted, and not *The Egyptian Pantheon*, it was printed by the date of her first communication to him (27 December 1907). The book's spare prose suggests that either it was written in haste, or the author had little else to say about the objects, or both.⁵⁴

The identity of the author of *The De Potter Collection* remains problematic. The most conspicuous candidate is Sara Yorke Stevenson. She knew the collection intimately and had begun compiling notes for a *catalogue raisonné* at least as early as 1902⁵⁵. Yet evidence suggests that Stevenson may not have written the booklet. In his correspondence with Stevenson, Armand de Potter characterized the collection as the fruit of "my searches for choice objects during many years of travel."⁵⁶ Clearly he did acquire some of his antiquities in Egypt, such as the Pasebakhaemipet material, presumably while conducting tours.⁵⁷ A reference in *The De Potter Collection* asserts that many of the objects had originally belonged to Clot Bey (1799–1867) whose heirs sold them to de Potter,⁵⁸ presumably in Egypt or France. This putative Clot Bey – de Potter connection has proven unverifiable, but the claim seems reasonable.

⁵⁴ The text for the first 270 entries in *The De Potter Collection* follows closely that of *The Egyptian Pantheon*. By comparing the entries, however, some differences become apparent. A number of pieces mentioned in the 1893 book do not appear in the later publication (23B, 24B, 25B, 241–243, 248, 265, and 266), and some objects are found for the first time in *The De Potter Collection* (19a&b, 26, 26a, 62b, 200a, and 263). These discrepancies probably reflect de Potter's attempts to refine and improve his collection through sales of unwanted pieces and purchases of superior examples. The later book contains ninety-five entries listed after no. 270. Some were already owned by de Potter in 1893 but not exhibited in the Chicago Exposition. One of these, an unpublished black stone head and bust possibly of Old Kingdom date (Brooklyn 08.480.22), is mentioned by de Potter in a letter to Stevenson dated 24 November 1893, U.Mus. Archives. Others, probably the majority, represent additions to his collection made after 1893. Among these are the Twenty-first Dynasty coffins (*The De Potter Collection*, p. 26; see above, note 31), and the Coptic textiles (*ibidem.*; see above, note 30).

⁵⁵ See above, note 36.

⁵⁶ AdP to SYS, Summit, N.J., 1 March 1902, U.Mus. Archives.

⁵⁷ See above, note 31. J. Lerner reached the same conclusion concerning three other de Potter pieces; *Expedition* 22,2 (1980), p. 16.

⁵⁸ "A great portion of it was collected by Clot Bey, one of the early and well-known Egyptologists, whose general collection was sold to the French Government, but who retained many fine pieces, which, after his death, were bought by Mr. de Potter from his heirs," *The De Potter Collection* (n.p., n.d.), p. 1. For Clot Bey's collection, see Gaston Maspero, *Catalogue du Musée Égyptien de Marseille* (Paris, 1889), pp. v–viii.

Stevenson, however, had a quite different version of the collection's provenance. In a "background memo" sent to the President of the University Museum's Board of Managers, she claimed, "Some of the best pieces were obtained by Mr. de Potter's father in Egypt in the days of Mariette [1821–1881] who was a friend of his."⁵⁹ Because we know nothing of Armand de Potter's life in France, including his father's name, Stevenson's statement is impossible of proof.⁶⁰ It certainly controverts Armand de Potter's claims and those made in the little catalog, both of which characterize the collection as Armand's alone.⁶¹

Perhaps Stevenson was merely "gilding the lily" in an attempt to enhance the collection's cachet, thus helping an old acquaintance, the widow de Potter, find a buyer. Alternatively, her account of the collection's history might have been accurate. The senior de Potter could have purchased part of the collection "in the days of Mariette," perhaps from Clot Bey's heirs; Armand, hardly a disinterested party, may have aggrandized his part in the collection's formation,⁶² and Stevenson may have been aware of the specific roles played by father and son. In accepting this scenario, we must conclude that either: 1) if Stevenson did write *The De Potter Collection*, sometime between 1905 and 1907 she was disabused of her erroneous notion of a Mariette–de Potter link, or, far more likely, 2) she was not the author.

That person was probably Aimée de Potter.⁶³ Intelligent and presumably well educated, she would have had little difficulty taking the

⁵⁹ SYS to S.F. Houston, Philadelphia, 27 December 1905, U.Mus. Archives.

⁶⁰ Michel Dewachter could find no reference to a de Potter among Mariette's friends and associates (personal communication; 21 September 1994).

⁶¹ De Potter's writings reveal an ambiguity about Egyptian art. He seems to have admired its technical skill but he saw the form, style, and iconography of statuary and relief in terms of his highly personal perception of Egyptian society: "Had Egyptian art not been wholly subjected to the rules of a priestly oligarchy, it certainly would have attained perfection. How admirable the sharp cut of the hieroglyphics, the finish of statues in red and black granite as hard as steel. How exquisite and durable the colors of the pictures. Yet withal we find a sameness and stiffness in the oldest monuments as well as in those of the decadence during some four thousand years!"; *Old World* 12 (1891), pp. 81–82.

⁶² Like many collectors, then and now, de Potter would not let humility mar his character. At least he freely admitted his faults. In one of his letters requesting greater recognition for his collection in the University Museum galleries, he wrote, "This may seem to you the expression of vanity on my part, and I grant that it may be so as I do not claim to be free from this universal weakness;" AdP to SYS, Summit, N.J., 1 March 1901, U.Mus. Archives.

⁶³ At this time Aimée de Potter was residing in Forest Hill, a fashionable Colonial boarding house in Asheville, North Carolina. Forest Hill survived until 1979. There is a wisp of evidence for the existence of at least one de Potter child. In a letter from Armand to Sara Stevenson written in 1896 he mentions that his wife "is with our little traveler;" AdP to SYS, Jerusalem, 16 March 1896, U.Mus. Archives.

first 270 entries in the 1893 publication *The Egyptian Pantheon*, rephrasing them, and adding at least one measurement for each object. Working from her husband's notes, and, perhaps from Sara Stevenson's as well, Aimée could easily have produced entries for the pieces not included in the earlier book.⁶⁴ Armand's "official version" of the collection's history recounted in *The De Potter Collection* is that which Aimée repeated in her letters to Breasted⁶⁵ and differs markedly from Stevenson's. Also, Mrs. de Potter liked to drop names.⁶⁶ If the books she forwarded to Breasted were copies of the recently produced *The De Potter Collection*, it is most unlikely that she would have failed to acknowledge the true author if that person had been Sara Stevenson.

Of the 432 objects mentioned in *The De Potter Collection*, something in the neighborhood of 232 ultimately came to Brooklyn.⁶⁷ Curators who have discussed de Potter's collection tend to disparage it.⁶⁸ Most of the objects are uninspired "collectibles" of a type accumulated

⁶⁴ See above, note 51. If Aimée was the author of *The De Potter Collection*, she occasionally demonstrated a more cautious approach to the subject than is apparent in her husband's *Egyptian Pantheon*. Note, for example, that in de Potter's book, entry number 7b identifies the subject of a bronze sculpture as Isis and Horus; in *The De Potter Collection*, a more qualified identification of the goddess ("Isis or Mut;" p. 3) is given. Also arguing for Aimée de Potter's authorship is the fact that the pamphlet's text is strained and forced—quite unlike the graceful style of Stevenson's correspondence. When we look at *The De Potter Collection* today, we realize that it has no pretensions to scholarship, in form and flavor it is a standard early twentieth century sale catalog.

⁶⁵ See above, note 48.

⁶⁶ In her letters to Breasted, for example, she evoked the name of Wilhelm Max Müller (1862–1919) who lived in Philadelphia while the collection was in the University Museum. According to her, Müller "knew the collection and has deciphered many of the inscriptions;" see above, note 48.

⁶⁷ The figure of 232 is an approximation. Because Brooklyn's accession records for 1908 have disappeared, the exact number of objects in the original de Potter sale is not known. In the late 1950s some de Potter pieces were sold in the Museum shop without being adequately cataloged; others pieces were apparently consigned to storage in 1908 before they were inventoried. Occasionally a Brooklyn curator will recognize that a previously unaccessioned object in storage is described in *The De Potter Collection*, but we will probably never know precisely how many objects were included in the original sale. Today the de Potter material is cataloged under the acquisition number 08.480.NN. The disposition of the de Potter pieces that did not come to Brooklyn is not known; nor is the process by which the final selection was made. Certainly no one in The Brooklyn Museum in 1908 had the expertise or experience to make a reasoned judgment. Perhaps Mrs. Stevenson or Albert Lythgoe (1868–1934) of The Metropolitan Museum of Art assisted in the choice.

⁶⁸ E.g., Cooney, *Expedition* 6,1 (1963), p. 22: "Despite its size the collection contained no outstanding pieces though it did include some interesting items, a few fine bronzes, and a showy coffin and sarcophagus from the famous find of the priests of Amen at Deir el Bahri." Although I would not argue with Cooney's comments, it is important to remember that the de Potter Collection as it exists today in Brooklyn provides only an imperfect impression of the complete collection that was broken up before the de Potter material arrived in Brooklyn.

by many Nineteenth Century travelers. The collection as purchased by Brooklyn included 109 amulets in gold, faience, stone, and bronze,⁶⁹ forty-seven bronze sculptures,⁷⁰ and eleven faience and wood *shabtis*.⁷¹ In addition, the de Potter purchase brought to Brooklyn many beads, scarabs, faience rings, gold finger-and earrings, and vessels in stone, glass, and faience, all now relegated to the "oblivion" of storage. However, the collection did contain some antiquities of artistic merit or archaeological significance. Some of the more noteworthy pieces from the de Potter Collection not previously mentioned in this study include a Thirteenth Dynasty round-topped stela (fig. 4),⁷² an Eighteenth Dynasty funerary cone of the "Prince of Kush, Merymosi,"⁷³ an attractive late New Kingdom vignette, perhaps from a *Book of the Dead* papyrus (fig. 5),⁷⁴ a glazed Bes-image of a type recently dated to Dynasty 22,⁷⁵ a Twenty-fifth Dynasty painted wooden stela showing the Lady Takhenemet and Re-Horakhty (fig. 6),⁷⁶ a green faience handle with the name of Amasis,⁷⁷ and a gilded mummy mask.⁷⁸ Although *The De Potter Collection* proclaims provenances for many of the objects, only the Pasebakhemipet objects come from a well-documented findspot, Deir el Bahri.⁷⁹

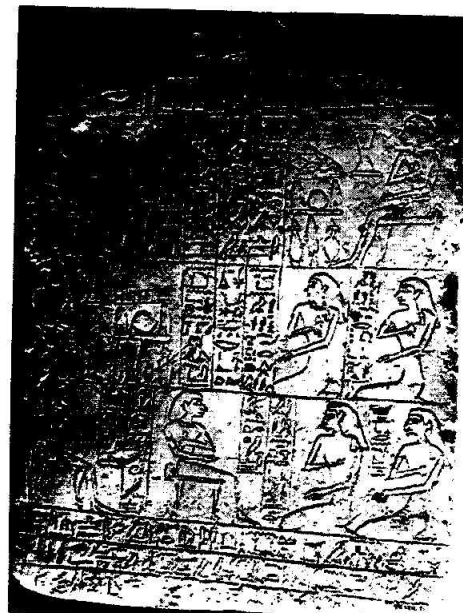


Fig. 4. Brooklyn 08.480.176: stela of Renefseneb, limestone, provenance not known, Dynasty 13, height: 40.5 cm, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund.

⁶⁹ Of these, only one has been published (08.480.108; an inscribed green feldspar figure of a woman [Maat?]); Kevin Herbert, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions in The Brooklyn Museum*, Wilbour Monographs 6 (Brooklyn, The Brooklyn Museum), pp. 54–55, pl. 27.

⁷⁰ Some of the better examples include a seated bronze Osiris (08.480.32; Günther Roeder, *Ägyptische Bronzefiguren*, Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung 6 [Berlin, 1956], pp. 169 [215b, fig. 228], 176 [220g], and 184 [225c2], pl. 78d); an inscribed standing image of Mut (08.480.45; *ibid.*, pp. 226 [278g, mislabeled 10.8140], and 227 [279a–b], fig. 271) and a small cynocephalus ape atop a palm capital (08.480.69; *ibid.*, pp. 373 [490d], 452 [617b] and 502 [674c], fig. 676).

⁷¹ One of these, a wooden figure, represents Ramesses II; John H. Taylor, "Aspects of the History of the Valley of the Kings in the Third Intermediate Period," in C.N. Reeves, ed., *After Tutankhamun: Research and Excavations in the Royal Necropolis at Thebes* (London and New York, 1992), pp. 198–199, pl. 19.

⁷² Brooklyn 08.480.176; T.G.H. James, *Corpus of Hieroglyphic Inscriptions in The Brooklyn Museum I From Dynasty I to the End of Dynasty XVIII*, Wilbour Monographs 6 (Brooklyn, 1974), pp. 62–63, no. 145.

⁷³ Brooklyn 08.480.222; James, *Corpus* (1974), p. 115, no. 258.

⁷⁴ Brooklyn 08.480.17; unpublished.

⁷⁵ Brooklyn 08.480.4; Jeanne Bulté, *Talismans égyptiens d'heureuse maternité: 'Faïence' bleu vert à pois foncés* (Paris, 1991), p. 21, Doc. 14, pl. 2.

⁷⁶ Brooklyn 08.480.201, unpublished.

⁷⁷ Brooklyn 08.480.16, unpublished.

⁷⁸ Brooklyn 08.480.3; unpublished.

⁷⁹ See above, note 31.



Fig. 5. Brooklyn 08.480.17: *Book of the Dead*(?) vignette, painted papyrus, provenance not known, probably late New Kingdom, length: 34.4 cm, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund.



Fig. 6. Brooklyn 08.480.201: stela of Takenemmet, painted wood, provenance not known (probably Thebes), Dynasty 25, height: 27.3 cm, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund.

POSTSCRIPT

After this article was submitted for publication, Virginia B. Bowers (see Acknowledgments below) told me of the Beckwith Society in Stillwater, Oklahoma. The Society referred me to Thomas G. Beckwith (of Gibsonia, Pennsylvania) whose grandfather was Amy Beckwith de Potter's cousin. Mr. Beckwith discovered a number of references to Mrs. de Potter in his family archives. Thus we now know that sometime after 1908 she returned to Red Hook, New York where she was living in 1928. As we suspected (see above, note 63), Amy de Potter had at least one child, for she became a grandmother in the summer of 1922. Not surprisingly, Amy continued to travel long after her husband Armand's death. In 1923, for example, she wintered in Algeria, and on 23 February 1928 (the latest reference to her in Mr. Beckwith's letters) she sailed to Europe with her sister, Leilla H. Harrens.

Acknowledgments

In researching the history of a man who died almost 90 years ago, I have had to rely the assistance and generosity of numerous individuals. Foremost among these is Virginia B. Bowers, City Historian for Albany, New York. I have known many historians in my career but none with more commitment, tenacity, or "love of the hunt" than she. The following list contains the names of other dedicated scholars and researchers who have helped me understand Armand de Potter and collection: Morris Bierbrier (Department of Egyptian Antiquities, the British Museum); Michel Dewachter (Paris); the staff of the Dutchess County Historical Society (Poughkeepsie, New York); Ellen H. Fladger, Archivist, Union College (Schenectady, New York); Theodore H. Fossieck, Chairman of the Genealogy Committee of the Albany County Historical Society (Albany); Marsha Hill of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Department of Egyptian Art (New York); Peter Lacovara of the Department of Ancient Egyptian, Nubian and Near Eastern Art at the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston); John A. Larson, Museum Archivist, the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago (Chicago); Leonard H. Lesko, Brown University (Providence); the staff of the Genealogical Section of the New York Public Library; David O'Connor, formerly of the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia); Alessandro Pezzati, Reference Archivist for the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of the University of Pennsylvania; Jean Rainwater, Coordinator of Reader Services, Brown University Library (Providence); Zoe Rhine, Library Associate, the Asheville-Buncombe Library (Asheville, North Carolina); and Deborah Wythe, Archivist, The Brooklyn Museum (Brooklyn).

